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Sierra Borealis
alaska report

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Anaktuvuk Pass and the road to Umiat

The Place of Caribou Droppings

Tucked in the mountains of the central Brooks Range, north of the Arctic Circle, lies the home of the Nunamiut people – the village of Anuktuvuk Pass. The Nunamiut are caribou people, Alaska's last nomadic group and the only inland Inupiaq village. They are a proud people, proud of where they come from and who they are. Today, their village in Anaktuvuk Pass is the only home most of them have ever known. In April I was lucky enough to visit them and stand in awe of their mountains.

I wanted to find out how local people feel about the State of Alaska's plan to construct a road from the Dalton Highway (haul road) to Umiat. Umiat is an outpost on the Colville River, just 65 miles north of Anaktuvuk Pass (remember in the vast state of Alaska distance is relative; 65 miles seems almost next door.) North of the Arctic Circle, this 100-mile road would cross through the untouched foothills of the Brooks Range, crossing major rivers like the Colville, Anaktuvuk, Chandler, and Itkillik.

The only way to travel to Anaktuvuk Pass (AKP) is via airplane. Well, you could go by snow machine if you have the time and a good map! At 5 am I began my flight from Alaska's largest city, Anchorage, population 375,000. From my airplane window I watched the landscape turn from the browns and greens of spring to the white snow blankets of winter. I was thankful to miss the most recent snow storm and flew through blue skies, landing in AKP, population 300.

Both the Anaktuvuk Pass tribal council and city council feel they don't need a road. A road would bring real problems to a community working to hold on to their Inupiat traditions. The Nunamiut were first visited by outsiders within many of the elders' lifetimes, and the rapid transformation the community has seen continues today. Residents do their best to hold onto their traditions and culture while satellite television, internet and outside products enter the community.

Lindsey arrives in Anaktuvuk Pass

Now, they face a grave challenge. The road the State of Alaska wants to build is not to connect people to people, but to connect industry to oil and gas and coal. Priorities—they're about money. This road, however, will have huge impacts on communities in the area, even Nuiqsut because it's downstream along the Colville River. A road to Umiat will bring resource development to wreak havoc on the land. A road will also bring outsiders to increase pressures on Native culture. The village will be challenged to keep drugs and alcohol out, to prevent tourists from passing through their historic areas, and maybe worst of all, to deal with competitive hunters competing with subsistence activities. The road will eventually be open for the public to access the foothills of the Brooks Range clear through to the Western Arctic.

Anaktuvuk Pass doesn't mean "place of caribou droppings" for nothing. The Nunamiut

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Anaktuvuk Pass and Umiat

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depend on caribou as a root of their culture, traditions, and livelihoods. Unlike Inupiat communities on the Arctic coast, the Nunamiut do not depend on marine mammals, but on the caribou that migrate through their village twice every year. A road will change years—even centuries--of tradition and the lives of their children and grandchildren.

The people of Anuktuvuk Pass are no strangers to hard work and the need for perseverance. These traits will serve them well as they stand up against development that threatens their culture and their future. I appreciated the chance to join the village for a short while, and I'm proud of the Sierra Club for standing beside them in this fight.

-- Lindsey Hajduk, Arctic Campaign Organizer

Another Road to Nowhere? – Scoping has begun

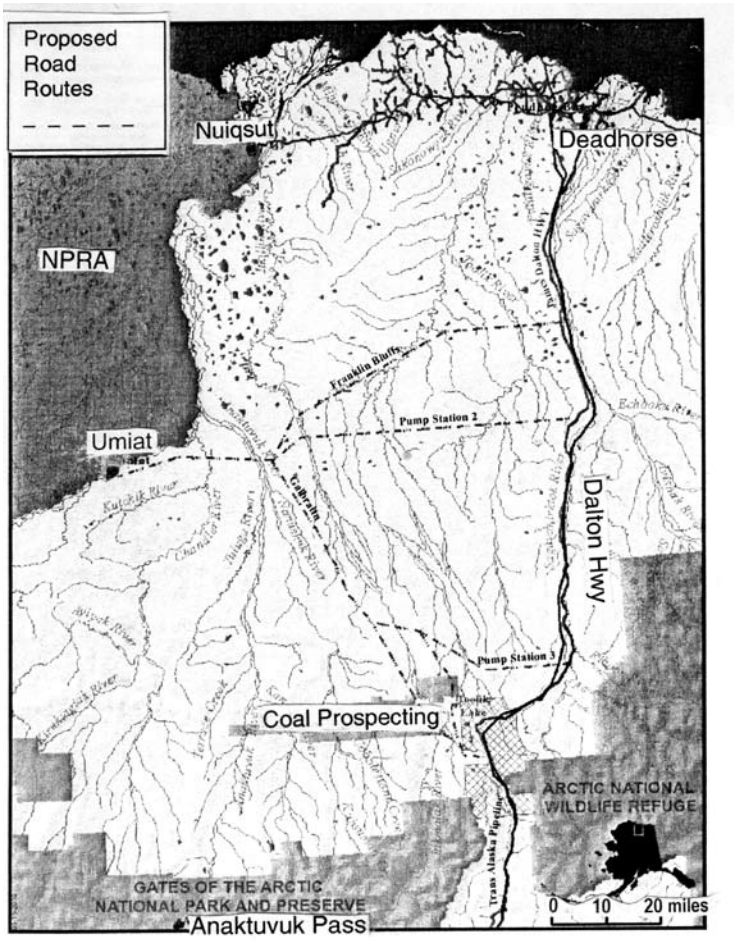
The State of Alaska is undertaking an environmental impact statement (EIS) with the US Army Corps of Engineers on its proposal to build the Foothills West Transportation Access project, known as the road to Umiat. As a first step in the process of seeking public input into its proposal and EIS, it is accepting public scoping comments. "Scoping" is the first effort to find out what issues the public wishes to see covered in the subsequent EIS. It's a way to assure that major issues of concern to the public are covered. And it give the public a good chance to express concerns early in the process.

Building a road to Umiat is a subsidy to the industry Rather than having industry pay for its own road, it will be funded with State money. It will cost Alaskans more than $360 million (on the low end) to build and over $3 million annually to maintain -- and we'll see no return on it. This road is not intended to connect com-munities but to connect companies to their gas and oil leases, and even to coal. However, many companies are pulling out because it's not worth while to develop their small findings. And no companies have actually committed to developing their leases—if they don't decide to, it's no skin off their backs because public money would be paying.

We want to be able to explore, enjoy, and protect Alaska for our own sake and affordably for the sake of our pocketbooks. But our state has a funny way of spending our money. First we have the Knik Arm Bridge to Nowhere, then the Anchorage Port boondoggle, and now we have a road to Umiat. But the road to Umiat has – until now -- slid under everyone's radar. Beyond the village of Anaktuvuk it has not been publicized. Right now we have a chance to say what matters most to us, to make sure Alaska heads down the right road, not the road to Umiat. ◆

-- Lindsey Hajduk

Map: Alaska DNR Division of Mining, Land & Water, 2009



TheDepartment of Transportation's preferred corridor is the Galbraith route, the farthest south of those to be studied in the EIS. It passes through a coal prospecting area to get to small deposits of oil and gas near Umiat.

⇨ WHAT YOU CAN DO

Attend a public scoping meeting:

June 8: Fairbanks, Noel Wien Library 6-9pm
June 9: Anchorage, Loussac Library 6-9pm
June 13: Nuiqsut, Kisik Community Center 6-9pm
June 14: Barrow, Barrow Community Center 6-9pm
June 16: Anaktuvuk Pass, Community Hall, 6-9pm

- 6-7:00pm Open House
- 7-7:45pm Presentation
- 7:45-9pm Public Comments

If you can't attend a meeting, please submit written comments **by July 5!**

Make your voice heard! Point out the devastating impacts on the local subsistence communities and ask for support of the Village Council and regional tribal council's resolutions highlighting concerns on the road. In your scoping comments, urge the State to weigh all the negative impacts on the community, such as social, environmental, and on their subsistence food supplies, particularly caribou.

The scoping period is from May 20 – July 5, 2011. Go online to send in your comment: www.foothillswesteis.com/submit-a-comment or mail your comment to:
Attn. Melissa Riordan, US Army Corps of Engineers, CEPOA-RD, 2175 University Avenue, Suite 201 (E), Fairbanks, AK 99709-4927.

Sealaska bill slams our biggest, wettest, wildest national forest

On April 5, Alaska's senior senator, Lisa Murkowski, introduced S. 730, the Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement Finalization and Jobs Protection Act. This is the new, 112th Congress, version of her previous bill to grant the Sealaska Native Corporation additional lands from the Tongass National Forest. This year's bill is only slightly changed from the 111th Congress's S 881. (See **Sierra Borealis,** March 2010.)

The Sierra Club remains firmly opposed -- partly from general opposition to privatizing the public domain and partly due to specific concerns about the value of the particular lands. The arguments in a joint letter last year from several environmental organizations to Congress (signed for Sierra Club by former Executive Director Carl Pope) remain relevant:

"Many of the lands that Sealaska would be authorized to select in [this Sealaska bill] are located within watersheds that have extremely important public interest fishery and wildlife habitat values that would be substantially impacted by the intensive logging practices permitted [by the State of Alaska] on privately owned lands. The legislation would transfer scores of small parcels throughout the Tongass National Forest from public ownership to private control."

The Tongass and Sealaska

The Tongass National Forest is America's Rainforest. At nearly 17 million acres, the size of West Virginia, the Tongass is the largest reserve of coastal temperate rainforest in the world. An island landscape fragmented by narrow inlets and glacier carved fjords, the Tongass stretches for more than 500 miles along the southeast coast of Alaska. Within the Tongass, lush stands of western hemlocks and Sitka spruce trees reach hundreds of feet into the air, protecting ancient stands of red and yellow cedar slowly maturing in the dappled sunlight below the canopy. These old growth forests provide clean water and spawning grounds for five types of wild salmon, habitat for grizzly, black bear and moose, as well as some of the highest concentrations of bald eagles in the country.

This magnificent national treasure was first set aside by President Teddy Roosevelt in 1902 as a Forest Reserve. However, over time, commercial logging and road building took priority over other forest uses. Since the 1950s, the great majority of the tallest, grandest old growth tree stands have been roaded and logged. The rampant destruction has come at a great ecological cost to the Tongass and great financial cost to the American taxpayers—who have had to subsidize road construction to access the remote timber.

Conservationists recently celebrated a victory when the Tongass National Forest was reinstated under the Clinton era Roadless Area Conservation Rule, which prohibits road building in national forest roadless areas, (see **Sierra Borealis** Mar 2011). Now on the heels of that victory the Tongass faces the threat from Sen. Murkowski's Sealaska bill.

Sealaska has rights to select and receive more land under the 1072 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and people all over Southeast Alaska want these claims resolved. The solution needs to balance the profit-making goals of the corporation and the needs of small communities in Southeast Alaska; between timber cutting and fisheries conservation; and between the corporation and the tribes.

Why oppose this legislation? Some reasons:

The legislation is extremely controversial and divisive in Southeast Alaska's small communities. The people of Southeast Alaska need more time to understand and comment on what is being proposed.

The legislation creates "Futures Sites" where the corporation would develop non-logging businesses. These selections remove valuable public lands from public use, and the bill is unspecific about what uses of these sites are planned. Anything goes on these lands except for commercial logging and mineral development. These "Futures" sites are located throughout Southeast Alaska and conflict with existing patterns of access and recreation, subsistence and commercial uses. Some sites, like Pegmatite Mountain, Spring Creek, and Blake Channel are actively opposed by local communities. Many are alarmed to see their favorite recreational lands in the forest becoming the exclusive property of the Sealaska Corporation.

Sealaska timber lands are managed under an outdated tree farm model rather than as an ecosystem that supports multiple uses. This single-minded focus on short-term timber profits ignores all other uses of the forest and makes it harder for local people, Native and non-Native, to live a traditional Southeast Alaska lifestyle. Some of the lands selected directly impact the ability of the Forest Service to transition away from old-growth logging while preserving jobs in the woods for Southeast Alaskans.

Sealaska's proposed selections contain millions of dollars worth of public roads and facilities built at taxpayer expense, unlike the areas they are authorized to select under current law. Sierra Club supports Sealaska's selecting its lands from those specified in current law. If lands are exchanged, it should be a value for value exchange, not acre for acre.

⇨ WHAT YOU CAN DO

Please contact your Senator and voice your concerns with the new Sealaska legislation. Call the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121 to be connected to your Senator's office. ◆

-- Dan Ritzman

Alaska Senators' new bill attacks Glacier Bay National Park

Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and her co-sponsor Mark Begich (D-AK) propose to open Glacier Bay National Park to subsistence gull egg collecting by the Huna Tlingit tribe of Southeast Alaska**.** Their bill, S. 1063, the Huna Tlingit Traditional Gull Egg Use Act of 2011, was introduced on May 25.

Federal law and policy on national parks prohibits egg collecting and all other forms of wildlife extraction by anyone in Glacier Bay National Park -- a world-class wildlife sanctuary and almost entirely designated wilderness.

When Congress enacted the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980, Glacier Bay, established in 1925 as a national monument, along with Katmai (1925) and old Mt. Mckinley National Park (1917) were long closed to sport hunting and trapping and subsistence practices. Congress reaffirmed the status of these three parks as wildlife sanctuaries, which is, of course, the essence of national parks. Congress also expanded Glacier Bay and redesignated the former national monument as a wilderness national park. The park is also a World Heritage Site, part of an International Biosphere Reserve, and is a critically important summer feeding area for endangered humpback whales.

In the new 1980 national parks and monuments carved from unreserved public lands that Alaska Natives and other residents used for subsistence, Congress continued such hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering by qualified local rural residents. Sport hunting and trapping were not permitted in the new units. An exception is Kenai Fjords National Park, which is closed to subsistence, due to Congress's finding that subsistence use was not present along this remote and storm-bound coast.

NPS-Alaska fumbles

The National Park Service itself opened the door to the two senators' attack on the park, after previously helping protect the park from seemingly endless attacks by the Alaska congressional delegation. When an earlier superintendent proposed a joint NPS-Huna Tlingit cultural interpretaion program in the park, tribal leaders conditioned their participation on the park's being opened to subsistence gathering and seal and mountain goat hunting. The superintendent agreed to consider gathering of eggs from glaucous-wing gull colonies in the park.

His concession led to a bill quietly slipped through Congress for a study of potential egg gathering, and ultimately to a legislative environmental impact statement by park managers that recommended opening the park to this subsistence use. The superintendent at the time of the study supported opening the park, and current NPS Alaska Regional Director Sue Masica concurred. (see **Sierra Borealis,** June and Dec. 2010). The study bill requires Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar to "propose legislation" following the study, presumably to President Obama, who cannot be required to propose legislation, and hence is under no obligation to do so. The Administration will present its position on S. 1063 when it testifies at the Senate committee hearing, which had not yet been scheduled as of early June.

Protecting the national interest

Maintaining Glacier Bay's integrity would not preclude traditional subsistence egg collecting by the Huna Tlingit. A half-dozen Huna Tlingit traditional glaucous-wing gull egg collecting sites are available within Huna Tlingit traditional territory just outside the park boundary, and tribal members can collect eggs at these sites using their own vessels. Or perhaps Congress could authorize the NPS to facilitate the villagers' gull egg collecting at the non-park sites.

There is a precedent for such facilitation. Following passage of the study law, park managers supplied a park vessel and accompanied a party of Huna Tlingits to determine whether collecting gull eggs at one of the non-park glaucous-wing gull colonies was feasible. The site did prove feasible, and the villagers confirmed that feasibility the following year, when the NPS again chartered a vessel for them.

Although park managers admitted that NPS facilitation of egg gathering outside the park is "reasonable and feasible," the agency, relying on a legal technicality, refused to consider this alternative in its legislative environmental impact statement. Under the National Environmental Policy Act, federal agencies are required to include all reasonable and feasible alternatives in environmental impact statements.

Congressional action on S. 1063 will be closely watched by other Alaska Natives and the broader Native American community. If the bill becomes law, it could lead to demands for similar subsistence privileges in Katmai, Denali, Kenai Fjords, and parks in other states, demands that might include additional subsistence practices as well. (As noted above, in addition to egg collecting the Huna Tlingit have requested that the park be opened to seal and mountain goat hunting.)

⇨ **WHAT YOU CAN DO** ⇨ *go to next page*

photo: Bob McLaughlin

Glacier Bay National Park

Matanuska Valley Coal Mine: *a coal mine in middle of a community?*

Just over a year ago, Usibelli Coal Mine, inc. announced plans to build an open pit coal strip mine in Palmer, AK at Wishbone Hill. Although leases had been issued for almost 30 years for a coal strip mine at Wishbone hill, no company had moved forward with more than minor exploration. In 1997, Usibelli Coal Mine bought the lease from the foreign owner.

Palmer is just 40 miles north of Anchorage on the Glenn Highway, and Wishbone Hill is located five miles north of downtown Palmer before the town of Sutton. Anyone who frequents the Mat-Su Valley knows that the valley's population has rapidly grown since 1984, when the State of Alaska issued a Best Interest Finding on this coal proposal. In 1984, the State deemed that mining coal at Wishbone Hill was in the best interest of the majority of Alaskans. However, presently, if the Wishbone Hill project moves forward, the open pit will be surrounded by residential neighborhoods, the closest home being only a quarter mile away .

A coal mine in the middle of a community presents many problems. According to Usibelli, they'll truck the coal to an existing train so they can ship the coal to Japan from either Seward or Port Mackenzie. These trucks will have to travel through the main population centers of the Mat-Su, causing more traffic, nose, and pollution, and making the roads dangerous.

Major banks, like Wells Fargo, have started to deny new property and construction loans to families within one mile of the mine lease, because of the reduction in property values. The mine lease location has traditionally been used by Chickaloon Native Village for hunting and fishing. Over the past five years, Chickaloon Village Traditional Council has received millions of dollars in grants to restore historic salmon runs to Moose Creek. If the coal mine project moves forward, moose creek salmon could again be decimated.

And all of this doesn't account for the negative impacts to the planet once this coal is burned in foreign coal fired power plants. Coal burning anywhere in the world is the largest contributor to global warming pollution. In addition, mercury from Asian coal fired power plants is already being traced in Alaskan fish.

The Sierra Club has been working with residents of the Matanuska Valley, Chickaloon Native Village Traditional Council, Friends of Mat-Su, and the Castle Mountain Coalition to fight the development. Together, the groups have hosted rallies and community forums to combat Usibelli's expensive advertising campaigns. We've tabled at fishing events, talked to classes, and presented at community councils. This winter, Bonnie Zirkle and Kirby Spangler, volunteers living within a mile of the proposed mine, even took a trip down to Juneau to meet with 22 state legislators, and briefly with U.S. Senator Mark Begich and Governor Sean Parnell.

When Usibelli announced its plan a year ago, it did so quietly and without fanfare, so that hardly anyone knew that a coal strip mine was proposed close by. However, because of our aggressive campaign, the issue has been well publicized, and you can barely open up the *Mat-Su Frontiersman* without reading about the coal mine.

In July Usibelli expects to release their feasibility study, outlining exactly how they plan to move forward with this proposed project. And in October, they'll be required to renew their Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA) permits through the Alaska Department of Natural Resources.

What You Can Do for Glacier Bay

Please urge President Obama, Secretary Salazar, and your senators to strongly oppose the Murkowski-Begich bill to allow collection of eggs from glaucus-wing gull colonies in Glacier Bay National Park, S.1063. Keeping Glacier Bay intact as a wildlife sanctuary will also send the right message to those who might seek similar privileges in other national parks--including, perhaps, your own favorite national park.

President Barack Obama: 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington DC. 20500.

Or call the White House comment line at 202-456-1111. A [usually] brief machine leads to a pleasant live operator.

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar: Department of the Interior,1849 C Street, NW, Washington, DC 20240.

Your Senators: Call Capitol switchboard, 202-224-3121, ask for your Senator's office. ◆

-- Jack Hession

What you can do:

Please help stop this destructive project from moving forward. This summer we'll have dozens of community events, canvasses and forums planned to get the word out. We always seek volunteers to help with tabling events in Anchorage and the Mat-Su. If you are willing to help the community, and the Earth, contact emily.fehrenbacher@sierraclub.org. ◆

-- Emily Fehrenbacher,
Associate Regional Coal Organizer

Alaska Climate Corner….

As the climate warms

A much reduced covering of snow, shorter winter season and thawing tundra: The effects of climate change in the Arctic are already here. And the changes are taking place significantly faster than previously thought. This is what emerges from a new research report on the Arctic, presented in Copenhagen in early May (as reported in *Science Daily*, May 4, 2011).

"The changes we see are dramatic. And they are not coincidental. The trends are unequivocal and deviate from the norm when compared with a longer term perspective," said Margareta Johansson, one of the researchers.

Arctic air temperatures measurements show that the most recent five-year period has been the warmest since 1880, when monitoring began. Other data, such as from tree rings, show that the summer temperatures over the last decades have been the highest in 2000 years. The winter season has also become almost two weeks shorter -- in just a few decades

The Arctic is increasingly a region of deep strategic importance to the United States, Russia and China for its undiscovered resource riches and the potential for new shipping lanes. The U.S. Geological Survey says that 25 percent of the world's undiscovered oil and natural gas lies in the Arctic.

Coasts open, Interior closes in

Global warming is likely to open up coastal areas in the Arctic to development but close vast regions of the northern interior to forestry and mining by mid-century as ice and frozen soil under temporary winter roads melt, researchers said.

Higher temperatures have already led to lower summer sea ice levels in the Arctic, and the melting has the potential to increase access for fishermen, tourists and oil and natural gas developers to Arctic coastal regions in coming decades. The melting has also led to hopes that shorter Arctic shipping routes between China and Europe will open.

But the warming is also likely to melt so-called "ice roads", the temporary winter roads developers now use to access far inland northern resources such as timber, diamonds and minerals, according to a study published on this spring in the journal *Nature Climate Change*. Ice roads are constructed on frozen ground, rivers, and lakes.

As the roads melt, indigenous populations could also face increased isolation and higher costs as some goods could only reach them via airplanes.

All eight countries that border the Arctic -- Canada, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States -- are expected to experience declines in winter-road land accessibility. Russia will lose the most land suitable for winter road construction by area, followed by Canada and the United States, according to the modeling done in the study, which was supported by NASA's Cryosphere Program and the National Science Foundation.

Timber and metal mining would suffer far more because it would be cost-prohibitive to build permanent roads leading to these resources. Ice roads cost only about two to four percent of what permanent land roads would cost, making resource extraction more cost effective in these remote areas--at least so far.

Permafrost and carbon storage

Large quantities of carbon are stored in the permafrost. The study data show that there is significantly more than previously thought. There is approximately double the amount of carbon in the permafrost as there is in the atmosphere today. The temperature in the permafrost has increased by between half a degree and two degrees.

The carbon comes from organic material which was "deep frozen" in the ground during the last ice age. As long as the ground is frozen, the carbon remains stable. But as the permafrost thaws there is a risk that carbon dioxide and methane, a greenhouse gas more than 20 times more powerful than carbon dioxide, will be released, which could increase global warming.

But the study also raised the possibility that the new vegetation which will be able to grow when the ground thaws will absorb the carbon dioxide. We still know very little about this. Thus, it is uncertain whether the thawing tundra will absorb or produce more greenhouse gases in the future.

Snowy owls and climate change

© Dale DeArmond

An owl researcher who has worked out of Barrow for 19 years says that the snowy owl has a role to play in understanding ecological changes in one of the fastest changing places in the world. Dennis Holt, who goes to Barrow, Alaska, each summer to study the predator-prey relationship between lemmings that crawl across the tundra and the white owls that hunt them from the air, said, "If climate change results in habitat changes and it affects the lemmings, it will show up in the snowy owls because 90 percent of their diet is lemmings. The owls are the key to everything else. "

There's also an unscientific reason to study the snowy owl, Holt said. They are a charismatic ambassador to the world to warn of problems caused by climate change. "People pay attention to owls more than other birds, because they look like us." (from *New York Times*, 5/23/11). ◆

-- from Alaska Conservation Solutions, Climate Change newsletter, May 2011)

Juneau Road Update:

Court Stops Juneau Road Project

On May 4, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a lower court decision that put the brakes on Juneau's half-billion dollar dead-end road.

This was a satisfying victory for the Alaska Chapter, which had steadfastly opposed this road as a boondoggle, and had long urged the Federal Highway Administration and the Forest Service to look at the obvious and environmentally preferable alternative --improving access to Juneau using existing ferries. (See **alaska report**, March 2008 and Feb 2009)

The road project, which was pushed by the State, would extend an existing dead-end road out of Juneau an additional 51 miles, along a steep, avalanche-prone section of the Lynn Canal fjord. The road would end at a new ferry terminal near the Katzehin River 90 miles north of Juneau. Here travelers would transfer to a ferry to Haines or Skagway. The price tag on this proposed road has continually increased, last estimated by the Federal Highway Administration in 2009 at over 500 million taxpayer dollars.

The Court's ruling makes it clear that improved ferry service between Juneau and Haines and Skagway must be considered, and that the reasons the State gave for not doing so were "arbitrary".

A recent report by the Alaska Transportation Priorities Project, "Easy to Start, Impossible to Finish: Alaska Spends Millions on Roads and Bridges Without Financial Plans to Complete the Projects", draws attention to the incongruity that in a time when Federal funds are declining, the State of Alaska is dedicating millions of dollars to projects, like the Juneau Access project, that it does not have the financial means to complete.

Skagway businesswoman Jan Wrentmore, chair of the Skagway Marine Access Commission, commented, "This decision takes a questionable megaproject off the books and allows the governor to focus on more viable transportation projects, like Alaska ferries and maintaining roads in the population centers of Alaska. This positive step will benefit communities throughout our region."

photo: courtesy of Irene Alexakos

Lynn Canal

Photo: Ellie Alexakos

The proposed road would be built next to Gran Point, a Stellar sea lion haulout and critical habitat area

IT'S JUST PLAIN UNNECESSARY

"The court decision reaffirms the State's obligation to seriously consider for the first time the one alternative that could improve access and save hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars: better ferry service in Lynn Canal with existing boats," said Eric Jorgensen, an Earthjustice attorney in the case.

Alaska Chapter ExCom member and Haines resident Irene Alexakos has ridden the ferry between Juneau and Haines numerous times. Irene says she finds the ferry reliable, safe, economical and enjoyable. She points out, "There are a number of reasons to oppose this proposed road: 61 avalanche chutes, the cost to taxpayers, and the loss of incredible habitat. Also, it's just plain unnecessary. Virtually all travelers from Juneau do so for recreational purposes. Highways increase our dependence on an auto-centric way of life which is unhealthy and unsustainable. The government should be encouraging more public transit not less."

Earthjustice has represented the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council, Skagway Marine Access Commission, Lynn Canal Conservation, Alaska Public Interest Research Group, Juneau Group of the Sierra Club, and the Natural Resources Defense Council in their suit against the Federal Highway Administration and the Forest Service. ◆

Road Deaths: No. 1 Threat to U.S. Wildlife?

Automobile accidents remind us of just how dangerous our roadways can be. With nearly 200 million motor vehicles taking to America's streets and highways each day, it is no surprise that some human lives end tragically on the road. But we often forget how many accidents also end animal lives.

Millions of vertebrate animals become roadkill every week, according to the Humane Society of the United States — a figure that excludes animal deaths from collisions involving off-road vehicles like ATVs and snowmobiles, (which incidentally are very dangerous to their human operators, let alone animals that happen to get in their way.)

Some species like the woodland caribou are more threatened from road collisions than from habitat loss. At one point when Florida panthers were on the brink of extinction, half of the extant population succumbed to road collisions.

The Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center, at Portage Glacier, takes wildlife orphaned from road kills under its care. Bears, fox, musk ox, moose and other orphaned creatures find permanent and sometimes temporary homes at the center following traffic- related incidents. Since many adult moose and bears need to be humanely dispatched or euthanized by state troopers following accidents, their offspring often are brought to the center. See www.alaskawildlife.org

Those youngsters that survive long enough to be placed in the wildlife center are sent there by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and the Division of Alaska State Troopers. This is also the case for animals placed at other captive wildlife facilities in Alaska.

In Anchorage, Alaska's largest city, 130 moose die each year from land vehicle-related accidents. People don't fare well either when their cars collide with an animal that can weigh as much as 1600 lbs. In one four-day period in the state seven people were involved in moose-related accidents. Between 1996 and 2006, such accidents claimed 17 lives in the state .

According to CNN, 1.5 million deer-related incidents are reported every year in the U.S., including moose- involved car crashes. To help Alaska maintain moose-free roads, wire fences and moose corridors have been established which protect both moose and travelers.

Wildlife conservationists consider road kill so much a threat to species survival that they now seek solutions through an emerging science known as road ecology. This discipline blends ecology and transportation studies, particularly vehicular and pedestrian traffic studies. Using road ecology, California's UC Davis Road Ecology Center promotes sustainable transportation "based on an understanding of the impact of roads on natural landscapes and human communities."

Animal deaths from collisions with road vehicles are a significant source of mortality for wildlife and will continue to be until traffic safety programs develop realistic solutions. ◆

-- Adapted from a post by Jordan Schaul of The Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center April 25, 2011, in National Geographic, Daily News, June 1, 2011.

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Sierra Club Alaska: 907-276-4108
750 W 2nd Ave Ste 100, Anchorage, AK 99501
Alaska Chapter mail address:
P.O. Box 103441, Anchorage, Alaska 99510-2429

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